KEEPING IN
TOUCH

February 1997

A Shining Light in Sydney

General Conference To Open With Outreach Rally

Soon, people from Metropolitan Community Churches everywhere will gather in beautiful Sydney, Australia for the most exciting and unique General Conference in UFMCC's 29-year history. Unlike any previous UFMCC General

COVER STORY REV ELDER DON EASTMAN

Conference, this year's biennial gathering of the world-wide MCC fellowship will begin with an event specifically reaching out to unchurched people in the local community. It could not happen at a better time. Today, a passionate vision and spirit of renewal is moving many congregations toward a new wave of outreach.

This year in Australia there are remarkable examples of effective outreach by smaller and mid-sized churches, which have made an impact on their communities through Christmas events. In Perth, the 16-member MCC reports that nearly 600 people attended "Carols By Candlelight," an open-air summer evening celebration.

Although January typically brings the "summer slump" to worship attendance in many Australian churches, at least 40 new people are now attending MCC Sydney as a result of the 1996 Christmas Eve service conducted in Sydney's historic Town Hall. More than 1000 people attended to enjoy an evening of celebration, including music provided by the 80-member Sydney Gay and Lesbian Choir.

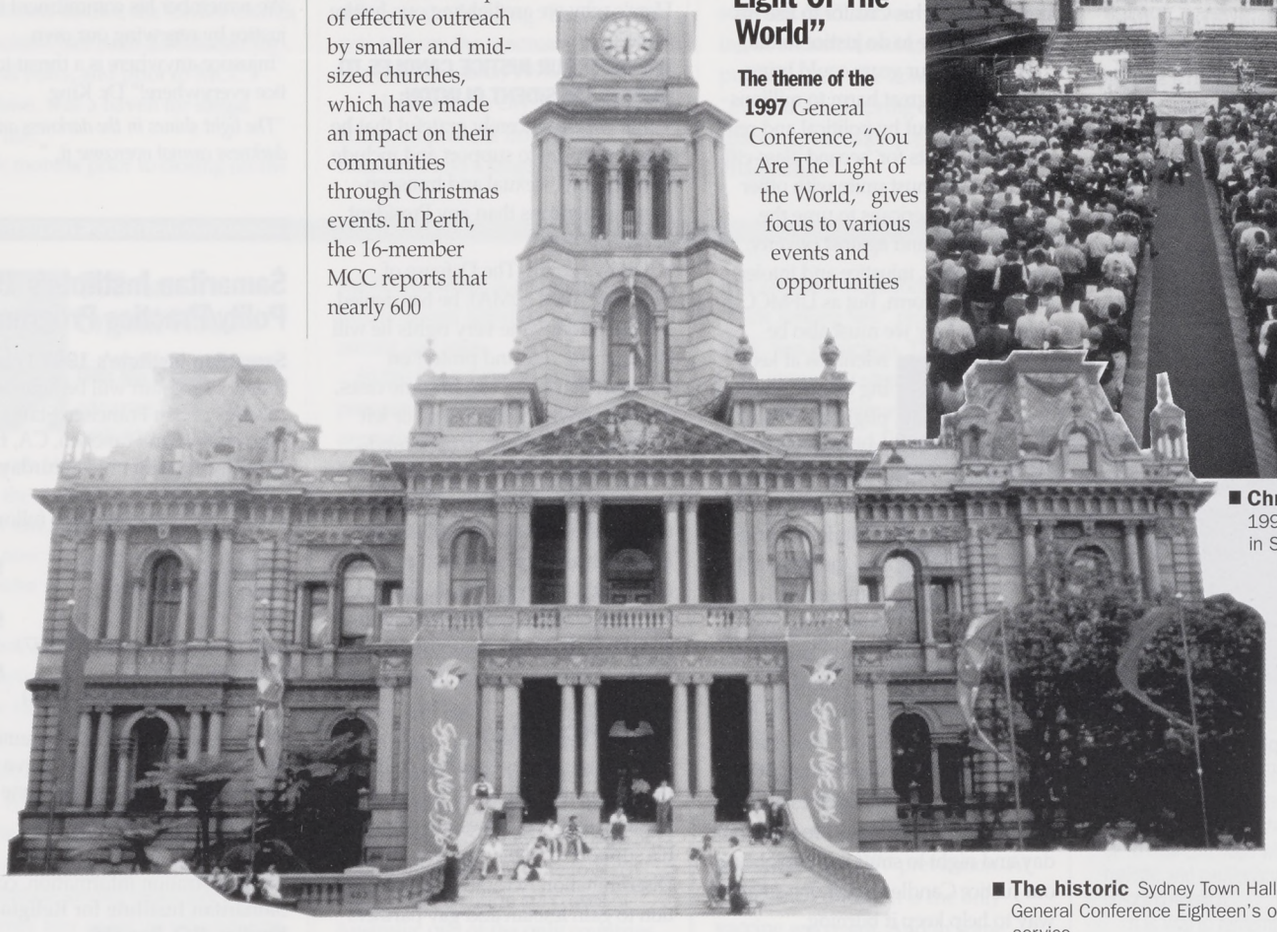
"You Are The Light Of The World"

The theme of the 1997 General Conference, "You Are The Light of the World," gives focus to various events and opportunities where people of local congregations can gain new inspiration and information for outreach and evangelism. Highlights of this General Conference will include special guests, Allan Boesak, South African theologian, pastor, and activist for justice; and Chung Hyun Kyung, Korean author, and Asian feminist theologian.

In addition to eleven inspiring worship services, the General

continued on next page

■ **Christmas Eve** 1996 with MCC Sydney in Sydney Town Hall.



■ **The historic** Sydney Town Hall, site of General Conference Eighteen's opening service.

■ **Senior Pastor** Greg Smith and staff of MCC Sydney lead a community Christmas celebration.

COVER STORY CONT.

Conference will include thirty workshops and four plenary sessions aimed at building skills and providing resources for local church ministry. An entire track of church growth workshops will be provided by the Strategic Growth Initiative to give new information and many hands-on resources for the development of healthy local congregations.

On Sunday evening, July 20, the majestic Sydney Town Hall will be filled to capacity with 2000 participants in Australia's largest religious event ever conducted with a specific outreach for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. Once again, joyous, uplifting music will give way to Rev. Troy D. Perry's liberating vision and message which continues to transform thousands around the world. Don't miss it!

■ **Over 350 people** attended a community Christmas celebration by MCC N. London.

DOING JUSTICE REV. MEL WHITE

"It is better to light one little candle than to curse the darkness."

THE JUSTICE CANDLE

From the moment we received an invitation to attend one of the 1997 Inaugural Balls, Gary and I knew that we couldn't dance at this Inauguration.

But we also knew that we should be in Washington, D.C. to signal our respect for the U.S. President's high office and to remind Mr.Clinton that he is called by his Creator to use his powerful office to do justice for all.

The next four years could bring great good or great harm to millions of us singled out by political and religious extremists for 'second-class-citizenship.' We must unite with other concerned Americans to urge the President to stand against poverty, racism, sexism, injustice and intolerance in every form. But as UFMCC clergy and laity we must also be relentless at keeping before him the plight of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered Americans.

Pat Robertson and the other anti-homosexual extremists have already launched campaigns to silence us and to see us stripped of all our 'inalienable rights.' They don't want our light to shine for justice, for ourselves or for anyone else. In fact, they are working day and night to snuff it out. Lighting our Justice Candles is just one small way to help keep it burning.

On Inaugural Eve, Gary and I lit our Justice Candles with a crowd of MCC congregants and our allies in Dupont Circle, the heart of the lesbian and gay community in Washington, D.C. Early that day, the Rev. Candace Shultis and I lit the first Justice Candle during both Sunday morning services at MCC Washington. Rev. Ken Martin's MCC Austin and other congregations joined us that same Inaugural Eve Sunday. E-mail messages are pouring in (RevMel@ aol .com) assuring us that others are lighting their Justice Candles. We have heard from P-FLAG chapters and other people of faith groups (including a gay and lesbian synagogue, chapters of Dignity and Integrity and other solidarity organizations, 'Open Door - More Light' congregations and UUA churches.)

The Justice Candle idea is spreading rapidly across the nation. We hope you will consider lighting a Justice Candle with us. If you have an AIDS candle or other commemorative candle burning, consider lighting a Justice Candle and blending the flames. The Rev. Nori Rost (Pike's Peak MCC, Colorado Springs, CO) has written a responsive reading to use with your lighting ceremony. Contact her or me for a copy of that wonderful litany. Here's why we are lighting our Justice Candles.

WE LIGHT OUR JUSTICE CANDLES TO REMIND PRESIDENT CLINTON:

• that we are sincerely grateful that he has done more to support and include lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered Americans than any President in history; but–

• that by signing The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), he has denied our community the very rights he will swear to provide and protect on Inauguration Day; and, in some cases, because of what he has done or left undone, we continue to be second-class-citizens in our own country;

• that we light our Justice Candles that the President will see the light and use his power with Congress, the courts, and the people to do justice, not just for lesbians and gays, but for all who endure racism, sexism, poverty, or discrimination and intolerance in any form.

MORE SPECIFICALLY:

...to provide courageous leadership in the war against HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening diseases,...to continue his support for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, ...to initiate legislation to gain lesbian and gay partners the 175-250 rights that go with marriage, ...to defend our rights to child custody, adoption, and foster care, ...to review the shameful results of his military policy and to end the military ban, ...to include us in hate crime protections and to help end the 'sodomy' laws, ...to help win for us the same rights (not 'special rights') that the U.S. Constitution promises all Americans.

AS WE LIGHT OUR JUSTICE CANDLES, WE PROMISE:

• to pray for the President that he might have the wisdom and the courage to work for justice during his second term, not just for lesbians and gays, but for all people who suffer second-class citizenship;

• that we will back our prayers with actions (letters, faxes, phone calls, e-mail, petitions, press conferences, public actions) that support and praise the President when he does justice and confront and condemn him when he remains silent and does nothing to oppose injustice;

• that we, too, will invest more of our time, money, and ideas this year in the cause of justice, not just for our own community, for all who face injustice, bigotry, and discrimination.

On January 20 we also celebrated the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We remember his commitment to justice by renewing our own. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere!" Dr. King

"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it."

SAMARITAN INSTITUTE'S REGISTRATION

Samaritan Institute's 1997 Polity/Practics Program

Samaritan Institute's 1997 Polity/Practics Program will be held on the campus of San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA, from Monday, June 16 until Saturday, June 28, 1997.

Cost for the program is as follows:

Registration fee *(due March 15, 1997)*	**$200**
Tuition *(due no later than May 9, 1997)*	**$950**
Room/Board *(due no later than May 9, 1997)*	**$450**

When making flight arrangements, students should plan to arrive in San Francisco on Sunday, June 15 and leave after 12 noon on Saturday, June 28.

For Registration information, contact **Samaritan Institute for Religious Studies, P.O. Box 688, Lewisville, TX 75067**
tel: 972/221-7749 fax: 972/221-7345

BUILDING

A Dream Deferred for MCC Greenville

MCC Greenville (SC) proudly bought its own church building in January 1996. Located in the city's historic downtown district, the former church and school had been abandoned for several years, and prior to MCC's purchase, was a haven for illegal drug use.

Six months prior to closing on the property, city building inspectors and the Historical Society had outlined the needed changes to meet building codes. MCC members worked hard and gave a great deal to make these changes. In addition, members of the church conducted "Operation Big Sweep" over a four day period to eliminate the filth and debris in the building. Their dream was to have the sanctuary ready for worship by Easter, 1996.

However, the city zoning board, acting on protests from three neighbors and a larger church, suddenly denied them an occupancy permit, citing the increase in anticipated traffic, and insufficient parking. No church had ever been denied an occupancy permit in Greenville before.

MCC Greenville took the city to court shortly after Easter. On May 21, 1996, the Greenville County Council unexpectedly passed an anti-gay resolution, a replica of the Cobb County, GA anti-gay resolution. The battle to rescind the resolution continues. However, in August 1996, a judge remanded the decision about occupancy of the church to the Zoning Board. The Board miraculously approved the rezoning request, with the stipulation that the church pave and landscape their parking lot, at a cost of $8,000, for which the church had not budgeted.

The property has been vandalized twice, but planned improvements continue. In spite of the setbacks suffered, MCC Greenville is experiencing abundant blessings. The unsought publicity from the zoning issue has "evoked a wellspring of support spanning virtually every background imaginable."

HIV PREVENTION REV. STEVE PIETERS

Still An Urgent Need

With the recent advances in treatment, with friends formerly sick with HIV now getting well, and with the decline in the HIV-related death rate, there are some people who now feel that the worst is over, and safer sex is no longer an urgent issue.

There are anecdotal reports of people saying, "Why should I worry about HIV now, when they have pills I can take to manage it?" There is "safe sex fatigue" among some gay men, who are just plain tired of taking the necessary precautions. And there is a fatalistic, sometimes suicidal attitude among other gay men who may fear aging, or who are simply chronically depressed from the losses they've already suffered from AIDS. The result is an increase in unsafe sexual activities, particularly among gay men.

In the face of these trends, HIV prevention education is needed more urgently than ever. In some places, MCC may be the only organization offering HIV education and prevention. If our denomination is going to continue growing, we must teach our people how to protect themselves from HIV infection. And we must re-motivate our people to practice safer sex as well as to exchange or properly clean their needles.

A number of opportunities are coming up to help us all re-charge our prevention efforts. At General Conference in Sydney, there will be opportunity for everyone to learn from the prevention successes of Australia, one of the only countries in the world to have a successful HIV prevention campaign. There will also be a workshop on the "Men Talking Sex" program of MCC San Francisco. This program is an important step in HIV prevention, and Rev. Steve Pieters, Rev. Jim Mitulski, and Eric Rofes are working on making this a Fellowship-wide program.

In addition, UFMCC AIDS Ministry has applied for another grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, to update and revise the Peer Education Program (PEP/MCC) for use with adults.

Even with the treatment advances of the last year, it continues to be necessary to teach and motivate everyone about the on-going need for HIV prevention. At this point, education is the only vaccine we've got. And in some places, MCC may be the only place where the vaccine is offered.

HIV/AIDS EDUCATION

Have You Read...?

An important article on protease inhibitors, "The Morning After" appears in the February, 1997 issue of *Poz* Magazine. While acknowledging the excitement of the turnaround in health many people are experiencing with protease inhibitors (PI's), the article asserts that recent advances are "a double-edged sword."

San Francisco researcher Don Abrams is quoted in the article as saying, "We're in the middle of the honeymoon period with these drugs, and whether this is going to be an enduring marriage is unclear." As studies of PI's continue, more and more is being learned: for instance, these new drugs work best for those who are recently infected, and those who have never been on antiviral therapies. Some researchers are reporting that 15 - 40% of patients are not responding to PI treatment. There is an "unparalleled degree of cross-resistance", i.e., if a patient builds resistance to one PI, that person will experience resistance to all of the current PI's.

In spite of successes with early treatment, there are some who argue that early intervention may not be the best plan. "Where there is... a finite temporal benefit to even the best of these drugs, early intervention is not necessarily the best strategy." Why light your only candle at noon when you have the whole night ahead?

We now know that there are some patients who have experienced "undetectable" viral load while on combination antiviral drugs, but whose viral loads soared as time went on. "If becoming 'undetectable' on nucleoside combos hasn't prevented progression to disease and death, why is 'undetectable' on the protease combinations impervious to failure?" Those who remember the honeymoon period with AZT when it first became available ten years ago, will remember there was an end to the honeymoon. Many scientists, researchers, and HIV/AIDS activists now fear that there will be an end to the honeymoon period with protease inhibitors. Yes, we're seeing a new day in treatment of HIV, but "that day may have problems of its own."

There are still hopeful voices from some activists on the frontlines. Rev. Jim Mitulski, pastor of MCC San Francisco, reports that in contrast to the years he performed 4 or 5 funerals a week due to AIDS, he is now doing about 2 a month. Michael Weinstein, activist and founder of the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, and a self-confessed pessimist, is optimistic that there will be a new class of even more effective drugs within a year or two, for those who had little or no success with PI's. So some people are feeling optimistic in spite of reports like "The Morning After." The challenge seems to be to maintain hope while keeping a realistic and cautionary eye on the on-going research.

It is vital to remember that the struggle against HIV and AIDS has not ended.

A FELLOWSHIP OF **ACTIVITY**

■ Emmanuel MCC, Albuquerque, New Mexico, is proud to annouce that with the help of its generous congregation, community members, the Pagan and Jewish communities, and Full Circle Books, their "Littlest Angel Program" was able to bring Christmas to over 80 Children!

■ Congratulations to MCC Austin, Texas, chosen as 1996 Organization of the Year by Out Youth Austin, an organization serving the gay/lesbian and bisexual youth of Austin and Travis County.

■ The Board of Directors and Congregation of Christ MCC, Miami, Florida, are very pleased to annouce that Rev. Dr. Jerry Seay has been called and accepted the position of Senior Pastor starting Jan. 19, 1997.

■ An Acclamation and Laying-on of Hands ceremony was held during the Nov 1996 European District Conference in England. Four Elders, the Revs. Hong Tan, Darlene Garner, Wilhelmina Hein and Jean White along with the District Coordinator Rev. Roy Beaney were joined by four of the Laity, Ken Rogers, Cecilia Eggleston, Dr. Holger Kohlhoff and Dr. Elizabeth Stuart, in "calling forth" and Laying-on of hands of Lay leaders within the District. There were 15 Lay Delegates/Observers, 9 Lay Interim Pastors, and 8 District Lay Leaders.

■ MCC of the Resurrection, Houston, Texas, held a Service of Dedication to celebrate the partnership among their newly elected Pastor, Rev. J. Dwayne Johnson, members and friends of the church, and the community in Dec. 1996. Rev. Arlene Ackerman, Mid-Atlantic District Coordinator delivered the message and she was joined by Rev. Eleanor Nealy, South Central District Coordinator who did the rite of blessing. Also in attendance were Rev. J. Dennis Johnson and Rev. Jamieline Johnson, parents of the Pastor.

■ MCC in the Valley, North Hollywood, California, has called Rev. Jeffrey Pulling as it new Senior Pastor, and he began in January. Rev. Pulling is beginning his 24th year of ministry in UFMCC and is returning to California after 14 years in the Northeast District as an educator and District Coordinator.

■ Congratulations to Exodus MCC in Abilene, Texas who celebrated their 16th year anniversary in October of 1996. They are asking that friends lift them up in prayer that God will send them a permanent pastor.

■ January was the dawn of a new era for MCC of Bournemouth, England. For the first time in its eighteen year history they have their first full time staff member, Rev. Neil G. Thomas. Rev. Thomas has been Senior Pastor there for seven years part time and will now take on the challenge of full time Senior Pastor.

■ Congratulations to Rev. Gordon McCoy and Mr. Eugene Thomas of Resurrection MCC, Chicago, Illinois, who celebrated their 25th Anniversary in January.

■ Church of Our Savior MCC, Boca Raton, Florida is proud to annouce the election of their new Senior Pastor, Rev. Tyrone Sweeting. Rev. Sweeting will be relocating from Boise, Idaho where he was Senior Pastor of MCC at Boise. The installation service for the new pastor was held in January with the District Coordinator, Rev. Judy Davenport presiding.

■ Congratulations to MCC of San Antonio, Texas on electing Rev. John Nicholas as their new Senior Pastor.

■ All God's Children MCC, Minneapolis, Minnesota, announces the hiring of Pam Austad as a full time Director of Development. As Director, Pam will facilitate the MCC in securing funding for new programs, above and beyond the congregation's stewardship giving.

■ The Southwest District is proud to announce three new works in progress: one in Palm Springs, California that will hopefully begin soon with Rev. David Pelletier, pastor of MCC Maui as its pastor; a second one in Flagstaff, Arizona; and a third one in the South Bay area of Los Angeles, California.

Pilot Project Board To Be Set Up

The 1995 General Conference approved the "Pilot Projects" program that is supported by a portion of the 10% tithes UFMCC receives from local churches. Beginning in 1997 a half percent (1/2%) of the tithes will be put in a separate account "Pilot Projects Fund." The program's purpose is to provide funds to create stronger and healthier districts and global outreach areas.

The General Council has established a process and time line to implement this program. Applications will be available in March 1997 and the first set of grants will be awarded in November 1997.

A "Pilot Projects Board" will be appointed by the March Council meeting. This board reviews the proposals and makes decisions regarding awards and grant amounts to be made. The board will also review and evaluate the progress of the work by each award recepient.

The Board of Elders is seeking individuals to serve on the Pilot Projects Board. Applicants should be familiar with the structure and polity of UFMCC, have a background in non-profit (NGO) management and financial planning, familiarity with church growth issues and evaluation background. Please send your resume and references by March 5, 1997 to the attention of Mr. Ravi Verma at UFMCC, 8704 Santa Monica Blvd., 2nd Floor, West Hollywood, CA 90069.

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

Mark Your Calendars

February 14 - 16
South Central District
Heartwings Laity Conference

February 14 - 16
EXCEL Two Steppers Couples in Excel
Galveston, Texas

February 21 - 23
EXCEL in the Redwoods
Sausalito, California

March 11 - 18
Board of Elders/General Council Meeting
Los Angeles, California

March 21 - 23
Suitcase EXCEL Weekend
Pretoria, South Africa

Marsha Stevens and MCC shake up Lafayette, LA

Marsha Stevens' scheduled concert at Eglise Du Saint Esprit MCC, Lafayette, LA, precipitated some major changes for this small church. Stevens was scheduled to appear at the usual MCC worship space, in the Wesley Student Center, a university facility run by the Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist Church. As Marsha drove from Los Angeles to Louisiana for the concert, an article about her concert appeared in the local paper.

When the article appeared, the Board of the Wesley Center called an emergency meeting and cancelled the concert, and banned MCC from the facilities insisting that MCC find new facilities by the end of January. The United Methodist District Superintendent was quoted in The Daily Advertiser saying, "It has nothing to do with the fact that they are homosexuals. It's because we can't allow the promotion of homosexual lifestyle as a viable alternative."

Rev. Bev Stephenson, pastor of Eglise Du Saint Esprit MCC, hastily arranged to have the concert in the social hall of the First Lutheran Church. However, the Lutherans would not allow MCC or Marsha Stevens into their sanctuary.

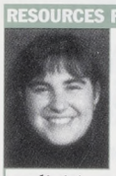
The flurry of newspaper articles about the controversy has given MCC a new visibility in Lafayette. And in spite of the first freezing rain storm of the season, 40 people still managed to make it to Stevens' concert.

GLOBAL HEADQUARTERS WEB PAGE

New Web Sites

First a correction:
the new website for the Gulf Lower Atlantic District which was published in the Dec/Jan issue of Keeping in Touch had a typographical error - **Sorry!** The correct site is: http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/1490.
The GLAD District also wants to report that their District now has 15 of it's 30 churches online with their own home pages.

The Great Lakes District now has a Home Page and would like for you to visit them soon:
http//www.GeoCities.com/WestHollywood/4047.



Free Video Rental for Churches

Church World Service, a division of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S., has a catalog of videos offered for free rental. The only cost is the shipping and handling to return the video. The videos are ideal for Christian education classes and cover a wide range of topics for a variety of ages. The videos bring global and faithful perspectives on the environment, women's issues, poverty, peacemaking and more. To receive a catalog, contact Church World Service at: P.O. Box 968, Elkhart, IN 46515 USA, by phone at 1-800-456-1310 or on the Internet at cws_film_library.parti@ecunet.org

Deaf Ministry

An extensive list of resources for ministry with Deaf people, called Together in Ministry, is available from the Ministries in Christian Education, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 848, New York, NY 10115. Included are extensive resource contacts, Christian education materials, hymnals for the deaf and videotapes available for sale and loan.

Educational Resources

For justice oriented materials for your small groups and Christian education classes, check out these resources:

Friendship Press Catalog: Books and Other Resources for Global Living: an extensive catalog of books, maps and study guides that address issues of faith and life around the world. Available from: Friendship Press, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 860, New York, NY 10115 or toll-free at 1-800-8895733. The catalog is free and the materials are reasonably priced.

Resources for Global Education from Church World Services includes curricula for adult education classes that range from free to $3, plus the Facts Have Faces series of study/action guides ($.30 each or 4 for $1). P.O. Box 968, Elkhart, IN 46515 USA or call 1-800-456-1310.

God's Earth Our Home: a packet for congregational study and action on environmental and economic justice, Shantilal P. Bhagat, editor; includes 12 study sessions, worship resources, leader's guide and more for $10 per packet. To order, call faith Quest at 1-800-441-3712.

Faith & Work: A Congregational Study Guide on Worker Justice, a six session study, including a leader's guide, video and participants materials; $15 for leader's kit and $3 for participants' study booklets; quantity discounts available. Contact the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, 1607 West Howard Street, Suite 218, Chicago, IL 60626 or call (312) 321 -2832.

The Blanket Program: an opportunity for churches to give blankets, school supplies, toiletry kits and other essential supplies to people around the world and to increase the global consciousness of your members. Contact Church World Service at P.O. Box 968, Elkhart, IN 46515 USA or call 1 -800-456 -1310.

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■ Congratulations to Rev. Austin Amerine, Retired Clergy of Sacramento, California who recently celebrated his 75th birthday, and thanks to him for his faithful service and ministry in UFMCC.

■ New Life MCC, Norfolk, Virginia just signed a lease on a property four times larger than their current space. It is a beautiful building and will give them lots of opportunity to expand their ministry.

■ Lighthouse MCC, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma has purchased a new church building and asks for prayers as they begin their pastoral search process.

■ MCC of the Spirit, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, had a wonderful building dedication celebration in Nov. 1996. Since they have moved to their own space they have doubled in attendance.

■ Congratulations to Ms. Margo Frasier, elected the first woman sheriff of Travis County, Texas. An open lesbian lawyer, Margo is a member of the Pastoral Relations Committee and former member of the Board of MCC Austin. Rev. Ken Martin, pastor of MCC Austin participated in her Oath of Office Ceremony in January 1997.

■ Excel International will be sending 11 people to do a weekend in South Africa in March; a great opportunity. Please keep them in your prayers.

■ MCC of Perth, West Australia e-mailed greetings from their members and gave us their new e mail address too: <doncamer~iinet.net.au>.

■ ICM Cristo Sanador has opened in San Juan, Puerto Rico! Pablo Navarro and Margarita Sanchez are now co-pastors of this exciting new church in Global Outreach.

■ "Coffee angels". Several people around the UFMCC are selling coffee from Puerto Rico as a fundraising effort to assist our new church in Puerto Rico thanks to each of you!

■ Prayers are requested for Rev. Bob Arthur, Mountains & Plains District Coordinator and for Rev. Malcolm Boyd; both of whom just lost their mothers.

■ Please also keep in prayer Rev. Elder Jeri Ann Harvey and Rev. Elder Charlie Arehart, as Jeri Ann's mother is getting weaker and Charlie's father is very ill.

■ Please continue to pray for Rev. Pat Leffler, pastor of Christ Chapel MCC, Santa Ana, California who had her leg amputated, she is recovering very well.

■ Please keep Rev. Reid Christensen and First MCC of Atlanta, Georgia in prayer as his cancer has spread widely.

■ Prayers are requested for the family and friends of Dennis Chappell who recently passed away in Oregon.

■ Please keep Bishop Leontine Kelly (one of our guest speakers at the UFMCC Leadership Conference this past August) in your prayers as she had a stroke in September. She is recovering well and we wish her God's blessings and a speedy recovery.

■ Prayers for MCC of the Pomona Valley, Pomona, California and Water of Life MCC, Tucson, Arizona, as both their pastors resigned in January.

■ Please pray for the Board of Elders and General Council for their upcoming meeting which will be held March 11 -18 at Headquarters in Los Angeles.

■ MCC Manila as it recovers from a fire which destroyed their worship space.

■ Rev. Judy Dahl and Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson as they travel to Mexico City for a conference on women hosted by ICM Renovacion.

■ Rev. Jorge Sosa as he travels with Rev. Dahl to Buenos Aires, Argentina. Rev. Sosa will be in Argentina for a month of consultation.

Keeping in Touch is a monthly publication of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. We are a church of the lesbian and gay community, open to all. Our mission is to call people to new life through the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ, confront injustice through Christian social action, and create a community of healing and reconciliation. Keeping in Touch may be freely copied for distribution in UFMCC. Portions may be reprinted in UFMCC church publications, with attribution. For other distribution, please request permission. Subscriptions are free upon request. Send address changes, news and ideas to Keeping in Touch, 8704 Santa Monica Blvd, 2nd Floor, West Hollywood, CA 90069; 310-360-8640, fax 310-360-8640, UFMCC E-mail: ufmcchq@aol.com., Web site: http://www.ufmcc.com Deadline for each issue: 10th of previous month.

Editorial Board
Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry, Moderator;
Ravi Verma, Director of Administration

Team Members
Nancy Fackrell, Rev Steve Pieters

STAFF UPDATE

Meet Our New UFMCCHQ Staff

Mr. J Hulsey-Mazur, the new UFMCC Controller, comes to us with experience in finance, development, and administration for two different AIDS organizations, as well as several years in the Finance Department of Wells Fargo Bank. He served as a nuclear reactor operator for the US Navy until he was discharged in 1989 for being a homosexual. J was a Communications major at the University of Missouri, and completed two years of advanced math and physics at the U.S. Naval Nuclear Power School. He enjoys a "wonderful relationship" with Andrew Rose, and he wants UFMCC to know, "It's a blessing for me to be able to do the kind of work I do, to advance the Church in the world, and I'm grateful for this ministry."

Ms. Yvonne Thompson is the new Executive Assistant to the Director of Administration. She brings a wealth of experience in administrative assistance and computer technology to her position. Educated at Santa Monica Community College, the Venice Skills Center, and UCLA Extension, Yvonne has worked at the United Way, and the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center. She was the first Black woman in retail advertising with the Pittsburgh Press. She also had her own "Backstage Catering" business, feeding Grammy-awardwinning reggae acts. Originally from Pittsburgh, PA, she comes to Los Angeles via Columbus, Ohio. Her husband, Peter, is Jamaican, and Yvonne has a 13-year-old "tree of a son" named Curtis. She loves people, cooking, and computers. She states emphatically, "God sent me here!"

Ms. Catherine Houchins is our new Receptionist. She has previously worked as a junior and high school English teacher, as a reference librarian, and as an administrator and paraprofessional in the mental health field. She was Pastor of MCC Ventura from 1986-1990, and also served New Life MCC in Norfolk, VA. Catherine received her B.A. in English from Carson Newman College in Jefferson City, TN. When asked about her new job as Receptionist, she says, "It's good to be back actively involved in our denomination." Please give her a warm welcome when she answers your call to UFMCC Headquarters!

James N. Birkitt, Jr. has joined the staff as Director of Communications. Jim brings a varied background of experience to this new position. He has served as vice-president of a network of Christian radio stations, spent 12 years as an ordained Southern Baptist pastor, and was Director of Development and Administration at MCC Richmond. He comes to us from Opus Event Marketing in Richmond, VA, where he conducted marketing and public relations for Fortune 500 companies, including Philip Morris, Allied Signal, Trigo BlueCross/Blue Shield, Circuit City, and Merck Pharmaceuticals. He holds the B.A. degree in religious education from Washington Bible College, and studied at Capital Bible Seminary. Among his new duties with UFMCC, Jim will serve as editor of Keeping In Touch, develop public relations resources for local churches, and assist with marketing strategies for our denomination.

GENERAL CONFERENCE NATHAN

Lottery for Free General Conference Registration Announced

Concerned about your expenses to Conference in Australia? Want to help your local church's budget? Submit your paid Conference registration by March 1, and you may receive FREE registration. All paid registrations received postmarked by March 1, 1997 will be eligible for one of three free registrations drawn.

"You Are the Light of the World," General Conference Eighteen, is July 20-25 in Australia.

It's countdown to Sydney —

Only six months away! Where are you and your church in Conference preparation? Have you mailed in your registration form? More than one hundred people have already booked travel to General Conference to date. Have you? Clip and save this conference "checklist" as a reminder of the things to do very soon in order to be prepared for Conference "Down Under."

General Conference Eighteen Checklist

_____ Mail Conference registration to UFMCC. *(Early registration deadline March 1 -- eligible for FREE registration. Request volunteer and other forms from UFMCC.)*

_____ Make travel and lodging arrangements. *(Above and Beyond requires payment by April 1. Call 800-397-2681)*

_____ Apply for passport and visa. *(This process can be lengthy. Contact Australian consulate for visa; country of origin for passport.)*

_____ Check personal insurance to assure international coverage.

DISTRICTS

MCC Manila Rises Up From The Ashes

In the early hours of New Years Day, MCC Manila's church facility was destroyed by fire.
Pastor Edgar Mendoza was alerted through a member of the church and resident of the building, shortly after one o'clock in the morning. The fire was thought to be caused by a stray firecracker.

Alvin O Santos and his partner lived in the church facility and lost their home. He sent notification by e-mail thanking us for any assistance we might be able to lend to them and/or the church.

In God's own providential way, the church in Manila had been seeking a new facility for their worship services. One had just been located but the congregation was uncertain about the move.

Three days later the church was destroyed by fire. Last Sunday, the first Sunday of January 1997, MCC Manila met in their new church home with record attendance and a large number of first time visitors! Even though the church lost their equipment and most of their church supplies, Pastor Mendoza believes the fire was a blessing in disguise for the local church. In a visit this past weekend to MCC of the Resurrection in Houston, Texas, a speacial plea was made to that congregation to assist MCC Manila as it recovers from this loss. Thank you for your generous giving, MCCR!

Please keep this church in your prayers and remember the two members who lost their home. If you are able to assist in helping the church recover from this fire, please mail a check payable to: **UFMCC to UFMCC Headquarters with a note designating it to MCC Manila.**

KEEPING IN TOUCH

UFMCC Full Member of CA Council of Churches

The California Council of Churches has voted unanimously to make UFMCC a full member of the Council. At the end of November, leadership of the CCC visited West Hollywood to learn more about MCC.

■ **Above** Front row: Rev. Cathy Cooper Ledesman, President of the California Council of Churches; Dr. Gwynne Guibord, UFMCC Representative to the CCC; Rev. Nancy Wilson. Second row: Rev. Don Eastman; Mr. Scott Anderson, Executive Director of the CCC; Mr. Jim Scurlock and Rev. John Freesmann, of the CCC.

CLASSIFIEDS

24 HENRY GUESTHOUSE
is a serene, non-smoking environment close to everything in San Francisco's Gay Castro District. 1-800-900-5686. (415) 864-5686. FAX: 415-864-0406.

ATTENTION GAY SERVICEMEMBERS!
Know your legal rights: Say nothing, Sign nothing, and get legal help if you are ever investigated. Call Servicemembers Legal Defense Network for confidential counseling (202) 328-FAIR.

MCC CHARLOTTESVILLE SEEKS pastor with commitment to inclusiveness, community involvementand church growth. Part-time position. Letters of interest: Carlton Dickerson, 2402 Smithfield Road, Charlottesville, VA, 22901. E-mail: carlos47@juno.com.

TRINITY MCC seeks a full-time visionary pastor for our 65 member chartered church. Located equal distance between the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean near the University of Florida. Congregation owns church on 6+ acres. Ministries include worship celebration, outreach and Christian education. Send letter of interest or request for application packet to: Search Committee, PO Box 140535, Gainesville, FL 32614.

MOTHER RIVER SPIRIT MCC presents, MoonSisters Drum Camp for Womyn, April 4-6, Sausalito, CA. Celebrate diversity. Worship - classes - performances. INFO: POB 20918,Oakland, CA 94620, (510) 547-8386, Ycdrumcamp@aol.com.

SAVE UP TO 80% on dental, vision, & prescriptions. Community friendly. $15 monthly per household. For free information call 1-888-711-2742 PIN 0949.

BROKERS NEEDED:
Full, part time. Excellent commissions & training. Own your business & help our community.
Call 1-888-711-2742 PIN 0949 for free information.

MCC NORTH LONDON, ENGLAND;
a rapidly growing chartered church with a vision for the year 2000 and beyond, is seeking applicants for a part-time salaried pastor with potential to become full-time. Are you called to serve in one of the world's lesbigay capitals? Enquiries to: (Pastoral Search Committee, Clerk), Nigel J Utting, 17a Beech Road, London, N11 2DA. UK. [e-mail: 106141.3250 @compuserve.com]. Closing date for applications: 30 March '97.

MCC RICHMOND, VIRGINIA
18 year old growing congregation of more than 200 members seeks Senior Pastor who can foster continued spiritual growth through small group lay ministry and provide leadership within the G/L/B/T and religious communities. Gender balanced, inclusive congregation with own building offers strong ministry in the areas of music, HIV/AIDS, social justice, and small groups. Contact Pastoral Search Committee, P.O. Box 6, Gum Spring, Virginia 23065.

GLOBAL OUTREACH REV. JUDY DAHL

Advent Angels Spotted Around the Globe!

THANK YOU...

Several angels have flown over Global Outreach since Advent responding very generously to the funding appeal and checks are still coming in. If you or your church have a gift to send and you have just been unable to get to it until now, great we'd love to hear from you!

Top 20 Tithes - November 1996

1. Cathedral of Hope MCC, Dallas, TX $8,221.55
2. MCC of the Resurrection, Houston, TX $3,244.92
3. MCC Washington, DC $2,771.70
4. MCC New York, NY $1,911.90
5. St. Luke's MCC, Jacksonville, FL $1,868.73
6. Joy MCC, Orlando, FL $1,543.58
7. MCC New Haven, CT $1,299.59
8. MCC Richmond, VA $1,204.80
9. MCC of the Rockies, Denver, CO $1,168.14
10. River City MCC, Sacramento, CA $1,092.63
11. St. John's MCC, Raleigh, NC $980.14
12. Harvest MCC, Denton, TX $958.65
13. St. John the Apostle MCC, Ft. Myers, FL $955.83
14. MCC Seattle, WA $943.27
15. MCC Charleston, SC $939.90
16. MCC of Greater St. Louis, MO $890.66
17. Agape' MCC, Ft. Worth, TX $847.11
18. MCC Charlotte, NC $812.14
19. First MCC of Kansas, Wichita, KS $802.78
20. MCC of Northern Virginia, Falls Church, VA $750.30

[These figures reflect the 10 percent of each local church's monthly income that is reported to the Fellowship headquarters.]

Top 20 Per Capita - November 1996

1. Open Arms MCC, Rochester, NY $43.08
2. MCC of Greater Hayward, San Lorenzo, CA $40.61
3. MCC New Haven, CT $38.34
4. MCC Johnson County, Shawnee, KS $35.69
5. Resurrection MCC, Chicago, IL $34.71
6. MCC of the Redwood Empire, Guerneville, CA $33.42
7. Gentle Souls MCC, Kansas City, MO $31.25
8. MCC of the Gentle Shepherd, Vancouver, WA $31.09
9. MCC Bridgerland, Logan, UT $29.47
10. Disciples ofthe Trinity MCC, Savannah, GA $28.14
11. MCC New York, NY $27.79
12. MCC of Paducah, KY $25.86
13. MCC Family in Christ, Ft. Collins, CO $25.79
14. Resurrection Beach MCC, Huntington Bch, CA $25.78
15. New Life MCC, Charlotte, NC $25.72
16. MCC of Northern Virginia, Falls Church, VA $25.61
17. MCC Charleston, SC $25.33
18. MCC Albuquerque, NM $24.88
19. Eternal Light MCC, Lacey, WA $24.83
20. Diablo Valley MCC, Concord, CA $24.72

[These figures reflect the average individual weekly offering to the local church.]

Top 20 Tithes - December 1996

1. MCC of the Resurrection, Houston, TX $8,525.19
2. MCC Washington, DC $3,614.76
3. King of Peace MCC, St. Petersburg, FL $3,482.25
4. MCC of the Rockies, Denver, CO $2,440.76
5. MCC San Francisco, CA $2,355.96
6. MCC New York, NY $2,353.19
7. MCC San Diego, CA $2,204.16
8. St. Luke's MCC, Jacksonville, FL $2,133.14
9. First MCC of Atlanta, GA $1,657.29
10. Agape' MCC, Ft. Worth, TX $1,639.23
11. Spirit of Hope MCC, Kansas City, MO $1,603.97
12. MCC Richmond, VA $1,538.11
13. Harvest MCC, Denton, TX $1,359.42
14. Covenant MCC, Birmingham, AL $1,231.16
15. All God's Children MCC, Minneapolis, MN $1,194.14
16. First MCC of Kansas, Wichita, KS $1,149.29
17. St. John the Apostle MCC, Ft. Myers, FL $1,123.32
18. Open Door MCC, Boyds, MD $1,121.60
19. MCC of Northern Virginia, Falls Church, VA $1,114.39
20. MCC Charleston, SC $1,039.69

[These figures reflect the 10 percent of each local church's monthly income that is reported to the Fellowship headquarters.]

Top 20 Per Capita - December 1996

1. MCC in Charlottesville,VA $51.41
2. Gentle Souls MCC, Kansas City, MO $36.60
3. MCC Johnson County, Shawnee, KS $36.05
4. Safe Harbor MCC, Memphis, TN $34.31
5. MCC of Greater Hayward, San Lorenzo, CA $31.53
6. MCC of Northern Virginia, Falls Church, VA $29.96
7. Resurrection Beach MCC, Huntington Bch, CA $28.24
8. MCC of the Resurrection, Houston, TX $24.41
9. Open Arms MCC, Rochester, NY $23.41
10. Good Shepherd Parish MCC, Chicago, IL $22.45
11. MCC San Jose, CA $22.20
12. MCC New York, NY $21.71
13. MCC New Haven, CT $21.33
14. Resurrection MCC, Chicago, IL $21.12
15. MCC Charleston, SC $20.75
16. MCC of the Redwood Empire, Guerneville, CA $20.06
17. MCC Family in Christ, Ft. Collins, CO $19.63
18. MCC of the Lehigh Valley, Allentown, PA $19.57
19. MCC Albuquerque, NM $19.48
20. Reconciliation MCC, Grand Rapids, MI $19.02

[These figures reflect the average individual weekly offering to the local church.]

Universal Fellowship of
Metropolitan Community Churches

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